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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 16 October 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. ELHOUDERI (Vice-President) (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

- Social Development: (a) Questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family [93] (continued)

  International Conference on ageing and celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing:

  (i) Reports of the Secretary-General
  (ii) Draft resolution

- Observer status for the International Organization for Migration in the General Assembly: draft resolution [138] (continued)

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Elhouderi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93 (continued)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: (a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING AND CELEBRATION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING:

(i) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/339, A/47/369)

(ii) DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/47/L.5/Rev.1)

The PRESIDENT: This morning the General Assembly, in accordance with the decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting, and pursuant to resolution 46/91, is holding the third of the plenary meetings devoted to an international conference on ageing and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, under sub-item (a) of agenda item 93.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ CASTEDO (Spain) (interpretation from Spanish): Spain, a member of the European Community, supports the statement made on behalf of the Community's member States by the United Kingdom. I should like none the less to make a few comments focusing specifically on the national sphere.

I wish first to say how pleased the delegation of Spain is to share with all the States Members of the United Nations in this international conference on ageing, during which we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. This occasion allows us not only to evaluate the goals achieved during the past 10 years, but also to set new targets for the 1990s that respond to the demands and aspirations of this increasingly important sector of our population.

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

We want to describe in this forum the efforts that my country has made in recent years to improve the living conditions of the elderly and the challenges that we have set for ourselves for the decade that comes to an end in the year 2000.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, as we can see in the report of the Secretary-General, there has been, throughout the world, and in particular in the more developed societies, a strong process of population ageing unparalleled in the demographic history of mankind. It would thus seem that the "Era of world ageing" has begun.

This is also the demographic situation in Spain. My country is ageing, and at an increasing pace. Its average life expectancy - 78 years - is among the highest in the world, and its birthrate - 1.4 children per woman - is now among the lowest. The pyramid of the Spanish population contains an increasing number of aged people, with a growing proportion of older persons in relation to the population as a whole. Whereas in 1960 those over the age of 65 represented 8.2 per cent of our population, in 1990 the proportion had already reached 13.4 per cent, and it will continue to grow in the coming years. It is forecast that by the year 2000 it will constitute 16 per cent of the population, while those over 60 will make up 20 per cent of the total.

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

Not only has the number and relative proportion of the population over the age of 65 increased, but there has also been an ageing of the older population itself; one out of every five persons in my country older than 65 is 80 or older.

During the 1980s Spain resolutely confronted these challenges, inspired by the spirit of the International Plan of Action adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna. In Spain all elderly persons with insufficient income are guaranteed a pension, whether or not they have made the minimum contribution needed to be eligible for contributory schemes. This means that in my country we have made pensions universal for the aged population.

A considerable effort has been made to increase significantly the amount of all pensions, always raising them faster than the cost of living, even in budget exercises characterized by cutbacks in public expenditure.

Health care has been made universally available by the national health system, with the result that all elderly persons now have a right to primary health care and hospital care, and to free medication. Over the decade new social services and programmes for the elderly have been established, meeting emerging needs and demands, such as home teleassistance, programmes of subsidized vacations, thermal spa care and temporary stays in residential centres. At the same time, existing equipment and services - residential centres, day activity centres, home-help services and cultural and recreational activities - have increased considerably, significantly improving the quality of care and the level of training of the professionals working in this field.

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

The community movement and participation of the elderly in all facets of social life have been encouraged, particularly in planning policies aimed at responding to the needs and demands raised by ageing. The role of non-governmental organizations in the attainment of these objectives is decisive in my country. Although they have thrived in the past decade, a great deal remains to be done, especially as regards shared responsibility with the Government in the development of significant action to promote full integration.

There continue to be unmet needs in my country, and there are situations of inequality among the elderly, situations not commensurate with our overall economic and social development. In fact, in spite of the noteworthy increase in the level of financial protection, there are still elderly persons with low incomes; elderly living in homes that are not very comfortable or are ill-equipped; elderly in poor health or, for a number of reasons, lonely and marginalized.

The phenomenon of ageing itself and the adoption of the United Nations International Plan of Action on Ageing led us to the conclusion that an integral plan had to be drawn up, with new objectives taking into account the increase and updating of services, and allocating significant resources specifically for the care and rehabilitation of the most vulnerable - in other words, the very elderly.

This is why since 1988 we have been drawing up the National Gerontological Plan to serve as a framework in which different organizations, public administrations, trade unions and labour and non-governmental organizations and private initiative itself could design programmes for the progressive attainment of our objectives.

(Mr. Rodrigues Castedo, Spain)

In developing this plan we took account of careful sociological research, recommendations of university professors and experts, contributions of political leaders and suggestions from associations of the elderly and non-governmental organizations, trade unions and business organizations. Account was also taken of the guidelines and recommendations of international organizations to which Spain belongs, and especially, as I have already said, of the United Nations, through the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

This is why it is possible to say that 1992, the year of the approval of the National Gerontological Plan, has been for us a point of culmination, the result of efforts made since that great event, the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982. It is at the same time a starting point because of this other great event that we are holding, the international conference on ageing to the year 2000.

The main objectives of our Plan, which can also help to make the question of ageing become a subject of broad public debate, are basically as follows:

To improve minimum pensions and other contributory pensions, guaranteeing automatic cost-of-living increases;

To guarantee development of the system of non-contributory benefits for all those over the age of 65 with insufficient financial resources and to offer a supplementary pension to those over the age of 80 who have lost their independence;

To promote the health of the elderly and improve their physical, psychological and social well-being;

To guarantee, within the framework of the national health system, preventive care and aid for the elderly through appropriate primary and hospital health care;

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

To offer suitable social services responding to the needs of the elderly, promoting above all the development of those services that encourage their ability to live independently, to stay at home and to remain in their usual surroundings, for which we need a broad infrastructure of resources and proper training of the professionals that provide these services;

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

To increase the knowledge of the social aspects of population ageing and everyone's appreciation and recognition of the values and the cultural heritage of persons who have reached advanced age;

To facilitate access for the elderly to cultural values and to promote their creative use of leisure and free time with a view to improving their quality of life and their ability to feel useful.

The development of this plan and the gradual attainment of its objectives will undoubtedly help to consolidate a pattern for the protection of the elderly and their participation in and integration into the society to which they belong and will promote strategies that encourage, energize and strengthen the implementation of an integral policy that can give full citizenship to an important group of persons, whose advanced age does not mean that they have fewer rights.

The year in which we celebrate the tenth anniversary, the first decade, of the International Plan of Action on Ageing is about to come to a close. The next 10 years will bring us even closer to the era of ageing. During the first decade of the Plan of Action we brought about an increased awareness of the problem of ageing and of the potential of the elderly, and we noted an increase in the number and scope of activities. In 1992, the year that marks the end of the decade, we see that there has been a broad response at all levels. The goal is that global objectives on ageing for the decade of the 1990s should constitute a practical strategy to channel our energy, interest, enthusiasm, specialized know-how and experience into certain priority tasks.

Still in the context of our National Gerontological Plan, which constitutes our strategy for the coming decade, I should like to mention a few of the tasks that my country is already carrying out or will carry out in the immediate future:

(Mr. Rodriguez Castedo, Spain)

Strengthening of mechanisms of coordination on ageing at the national level by developing and monitoring the strategy to be followed for the effectiveness of the social policy that we have designed through the Plan;

Promotion of older persons' participation, both individually and collectively, in all social activities - specifically, in the design and follow-up of policy programmes that affect them. In order to channel initiatives and contributions from different associations, we shall establish a State council for the elderly as an organ for representation and participation;

Fostering dialogue and intergenerational integration for the purpose, on the one hand, of encouraging the utilization of the cultural wealth of the elderly and improving their self-image and, on the other hand, of securing optimal integration of the elderly into their communities;

Developing national programmes for training and research in respect of ageing and age-related problems. In this context, we want to ensure the provision of facilities for professional training, ongoing study and research in respect of subjects related to ageing and old age as a basis for the establishment and promotion of social-policy measures that target the elderly;

Developing programmes of cooperation. In recent years our country has undertaken an increasing number of activities in the field of cooperation and international relations, especially in the Ibero-American region. Spain, as part of the Ibero-American community, has promoted an intergovernmental programme of bilateral cooperation. That programme, which is part of the framework for cooperation designed by the first Ibero-American intergovernmental conference on policies for the provision of care to the elderly and the disabled, held at Madrid in September 1991, provides for

(Mr. Rodrigues Castedo, Spain)

technical assistance, the training of professionals, and the endowment of travel grants for work and study visits to Spain.

In conformity with the conclusions of the conference, a document on policies for integral care of the elderly and the disabled in the Ibero-American area has been prepared and will be submitted to the second conference, which will be held at Cartagena, Colombia, from 26 to 30 October 1992.

The second conference will also study the draft constitution of an Ibero-American network for technical cooperation in the provision of care for the elderly and the disabled. That instrument will undoubtedly facilitate the exchange of information, experience, technical assistance and professional training.

In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation to the United Nations for its efforts in the area of ageing; to reaffirm my country's support for all the objectives that the Organization seeks to attain in the decade that will take us to the year 2000; to assure everyone that Spain will continue to give priority to the problems of ageing; and, on behalf of the delegation of Spain, to express our best wishes for the endeavours that unite all of us here.

Mr. GALAL (Egypt) (interpretation from Arabic): Today the United Nations celebrates the tenth anniversary of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. This celebration is a duty and a necessity, for the elderly are people who have devoted the best part of their lives and efforts to their countries in particular and to the international community in general. Consequently we have a duty to provide them with the necessary care as they enter on a new phase of life which imposes burdens and responsibilities that are different from those of earlier years.

(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

The issue of ageing is very important, for more than one reason. First, it involves a segment of society that is considered to be vulnerable - hence our duty to provide the necessary care for that segment.

(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

Secondly, it is closely related to one of the essential human values upheld by one and all, namely the value of recognition and gratitude which requires us not to forget the elderly's role and the fact that they are people who have spent their lives building their countries. The following generations have to translate recognition and gratitude into practical measures.

Thirdly, the issue is also related to the succession of generations in society, the role and responsibilities of each and every generation towards its predecessors and its successors.

The Government and people of Egypt have always cared for the elderly. This is an attitude that stems from our cultural background and religious traditions which make respect and care for the elderly a duty and a responsibility of the individual and society alike. Legislation has extended particular travel and transportation facilities to the elderly, facilities such as priority seating space and cheaper travel tickets. Moreover, young people responsible for an elderly family are exempt from military service so as to enable them to continue to care for their ageing parents. Egypt has promulgated a law which gives every Egyptian citizen the right to a pension even if he had not been a civil servant.

The Ministry of Social Affairs provides special care for the elderly and implements the International Plan of Action on Ageing at a time when the numbers of elderly are increasing from one year to the next, due to better health care and a higher standard of living.

Various Government bodies in Egypt engage retired elderly persons in a consultative capacity in many cultural areas, research centres and

(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

universities in order not to waste their acquired experience and to ensure the transfer of experience and know-how from one generation to another.

International recognition of the efforts and contributions of the elderly is the least we can do for those who have given the best years of their lives to their countries. More than 20 years ago, Egypt established two awards which are granted annually, to the outstanding young and elderly members of society. The first is an incentive award given to young scientists, researchers and intellectuals. The second is an award of appreciation given to the outstanding members of the older generations for valuable contributions to the scientific and literary life of the country.

The Egyptian Arab author Naguib Mahfooz, who is now 82, was given both awards in the course of his lifetime. Moreover, in 1988, as members will recall, the Swedish Academy awarded him the Nobel prize for literature. That indeed is an example of the contribution that can be given by the elderly and the recognition that can be extended to them.

Mr. BILOA TANG (Cameroon): My delegation takes particular pleasure in participating in the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Aging. The celebration of this event, together with the activities organized at national and international levels in observance of the International Day for the Elderly, illustrates the resolve of the international community for the empowerment of the elderly in our societies to survive, to develop and to participate.

Owing to this very principle of enhanced survival and care the population of the ageing is expected to increase by 20 per cent by the year 2000, particularly in developing countries where life expectancy is increasing as communities become more aware of the need to protect and to cater to the health needs of their elderly.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

In order to prepare societies for the coming ageing of their populations, the United Nations since 1982 has undertaken a series of measures which my delegation fully appreciates. These have included the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the establishment within its framework of the International Institute of Ageing in Malta, the African Society of Gerontology, the Banyan Fund Association, and the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing established in 1980 to provide technical assistance to developing countries on issues related to the elderly.

It is 10 years since the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and its institutional framework and last year a positive trend was recorded in the establishment of further international legislation on the elderly by the adoption at the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. The Principles, which address such issues as independence for the elderly at home and in the workplace, participation of older persons in society and in policy-making, care from family, community and society, self-fulfilment and recreational resources, dignity, and security and freedom from exploitation or abuse, represent international consensus on the key issues that must be addressed in the process of empowering the elderly.

Bearing in mind the above concerns, we wish to extend our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the United Nations unit on ageing at the United Nations Office in Vienna, for having adopted a consultative approach aimed at elaborating a practical strategy for the years 1992 to 2001 to improve the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in such a way as to preserve the consensus that obtained in elaborating the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

Since one of the major objectives of the current debate is to pronounce ourselves the targets set for the elderly to the year 2000, my delegation feels that the best approach would be one that combined a macro-planning approach and a micro-pragmatic response in integrating activities on ageing in the mainstream of activities for development. The approach to be applied would of course depend on the level of development of each nation. In Cameroon the Gcvernment is leaning towards the micro-pragmatic response of utilizing scarce resources in the establishment of an effective care system for the frail elderly through an adequate pension scheme, improved accessibility to health-care benefits and the education of youth to take care of their elderly within the framework of the family. The training of society's youth to maintain the tradition of respect for the talent and potential of the elderly has remained a vital component of our informal and formal educational system.

In light of the above, the target to the year 2001 on ageing falls well within the confines of our national aspirations on these issues. Equally, we endorse the Secretary-General's proposal to harmonize research and foster cooperation on ageing by the creation of an international senior volunteer corps for peace and development.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

The years ahead provide ample opportunity to sharpen and enhance our programmes for the elderly during the second decade of implementation of the world programme on ageing. The debates in the forthcoming Conferences on Human Rights (1993), on Population (1994), on Social Development (1995) and on Women (1995), each of which the Secretary-General has requested to dedicate a vital component to the question of ageing, should contribute to this goal.

Finally, the issue of cost-effectiveness of United Nations system-wide activities on ageing and those of non-governmental organizations has been raised in regard to the implementation of programmes for the elderly during the next decade. We support the Secretary-General's proposal that an appropriate mix of regular budget funds and extrabudgetary resources would be of vital importance to the capacity of the United Nations to provide technical assistance and advisory services in the field of the ageing. To this end, the same principle would apply in the strengthening of the Vienna Unit on Ageing, which plays a prominent advisory role.

Mr. MOTAVA (Austria): The World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna at the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in 1982, adopted the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. This plan of action was to be considered an integral component of the major international, regional and national strategies and programmes formulated in response to important world problems and needs. Its primary aim, however, was to strengthen the capacities of countries to deal effectively with the ageing of their populations and with the special needs of their elderly.

In 1950, according to United Nations estimates, there were approximately 200 million persons 60 years of age and older throughout the world. According

(Mr. Motava, Austria)

to United Nations projections, by the year 2025 there will be over 1.1 billion elderly persons. For Austria, this demographic background means that the age distribution of its population will undergo significant changes within the coming years. Between 1986 and 2011 the group of citizens over 65 years of age in Austria will increase by 29 per cent; the group of citizens over 85 years of age will grow by as much as 79 per cent.

As is the case in other countries, this development will pose a certain challenge to Austria in so far as the integrative capabilities of society are concerned. In order to secure a decent income for the elderly, the active members of society have to provide for an increasingly heavier burden of pension payments. The positive development of people living longer, owing to medical progress and improved social conditions, particularly in the workplace, has an important financial impact on the payment of old-age pensions, as individuals will receive pensions over longer periods of time. Such pensions must be financed by the active work force. This is only one, but an important, aspect of ageing that concerns practically every member of society.

Another element already taken into consideration in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing relates to encouraging Governments to facilitate the participation of older persons in economic life and society with the aim of passing on to young people the knowledge often accumulated by the elderly. In other words, the elderly should serve where possible as transmitters of skills, information and knowledge. The endeavours made to maintain the skills and qualifications of older persons for the labour market are counteracted in practical life by the conduct of some employers: the less expensive and mostly younger labour force is used in place of older persons,

(Mr. Wotava, Austria)

who are let go. Special programmes aiming at the social protection of older workers are at present under political negotiation.

In the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, the United Nations has taken into consideration not only the demographic aspects but also the humanitarian and development aspects of ageing. Principles were established, recommendations for action were worked out for Governments, and areas of concern to ageing individuals were defined.

Almost 10 years later the Commission on Social Development, at its thirty-second session, held in Vienna from 11 to 23 February 1991, adopted the United Nations principles for older persons, based on the International Plan of Action on Ageing. With these principles, a catalogue of standards for and special rights of the elderly was established. In very clear language, the Governments were invited to incorporate the principles of independence, care, self-fulfilment and dignity into their national programmes whenever possible.

Let me point out once again that, with the establishment of these principles, the activities of the United Nations and, in particular, of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at Vienna will have an overwhelming impact on mankind as a whole and on practically every individual.

The comparatively high social standard in Austria applies, of course, to older persons as well. A sufficient financial guarantee for older persons in every situation of life - regardless of whether they are still active, out of work or on pension - represents a precondition for the implementation of the United Nations principles for older persons: independence, participation, self-fulfilment and dignity. Apart from the group of active older persons, there are those who need the special care and attention of society, namely, the group in need of regular care.

(Mr. Wotava, Austria)

Therefore, the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs of Austria, encouraged by the activities that are part of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, has created the basis for a reform of the provisions for care. In the immediate future a draft bill will be presented to the Austrian Parliament that will provide to all persons in need of care, regardless of the cause of their need, harmonized financial support and payment in kind based on their need.

On 1 October 1991 the United Nations celebrated the first International Day for the Elderly. According to the Secretariat, the response worldwide to this celebration was impressive, ranging from messages from Heads of State and the strong interest shown by the mass media to discussions and numerous commemorative events. In this way, the United Nations has developed a deep sense of awareness of the situation and of the problems confronting about one-half billion elderly persons world wide.

(Mr. Wotava, Austria)

The special meetings of the General Assembly on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing confirms the responsibility the United Nations is ready to bear in this field. These commemorative meetings provide an adequate opportunity for Member States to recognize and emphasize the importance of United Nations work in the field of social development and humanitarian affairs, but this is also a suitable occasion for congratulating the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs on its achievements in the past in the important area of ageing in spite of all the personnel and financial constraints to which the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, including the Ageing Unit, has been exposed since its very beginning.

Finally, my delegation would like to use this opportunity to express our sincere wishes to the United Nations for fruitful and successful work in the area of social development and humanitarian affairs in the future.

Mr. OFFMANN (Mauritius): My delegation and I are deeply honoured to participate in these historic plenary meetings of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the vital issue of ageing. I would therefore like to commend this laudable initiative, which is indeed a landmark in the already rich history of the United Nations.

A glance at population dynamics in the developing world gives much cause for concern to gerontologists and social policy makers. The ageing population in the developing countries is increasing at an alarming rate. In the African region, for example, it is estimated that the elderly population will reach 42 million in the year 2000, and around the astronomic figure 100 million in the year 2025.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

The most disturbing feature of this situation is that within the elderly population the numbers of the very old - those above the age of 80 - will grow at a very fast rate. In a nutshell, the developing world is developing an ageing syndrome.

This situation will have far-reaching repercussions on care for the elderly, social security and housing health sectors. Consequently undue pressure will be brought to bear on the already fragile economies of developing countries.

I shall now say a few words on the emergence of new needs in the field of care for the elderly. social security and social services.

The extended family system and the community still constitute the primary sources of care for the elderly in developing countries. But urbanization, rapid industrialization and modernization are gradually eroding these traditional support networks. The traditional family system is breaking down, and the general tendency today is towards the nuclear family system. This problem is magnified by the fact that the populations of these countries are ageing at an unprecedented rate, with the biggest concentration in the upper groups, which require constant care.

Greater pressure will be exerted on the social security system, which will be expected to be in a position to bear the financial brunt. Otherwise the socio-economic fabric may experience chaos and instability.

Equally pressing will be the demands in the fields of health, housing and recreation facilities for the benefit of the elderly. Additional infrastructures need to be implemented to be able to cope with these new needs.

It is high time therefore that we started considering the adoption of a new methodology and a new approach to deal with the issues I have mentioned along more rational and cost-effective lines. Our proposals are as follows.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

The following measures or programmes could be considered in support of the integration of the elderly in the family: grants to encourage the establishment of multi-generational projects; educational programmes promoting the roles of the elderly in the family, including counselling and mediating, as well as evaluating and transmitting culture and heritage; interest-free or low interest loans for dwelling improvement for families that keep their elderly at home; and reward for time spent on care for the elderly, such as tax exemptions, care-giver's leave from the workplace, and contributions towards pension entitlements.

Research in gerontology and geriatrics should be a major component in any strategy aimed at enhancing the welfare of the elderly population.

National mechanisms need to be instituted to develop and coordinate policies and programmes related to ageing. Research centres dealing with the ageing of population should be set up. Their functions should be, inter alia, to collect data relating to ageing, to disseminate regular reports on the national ageing situation, to produce and disseminate a national directory of public and private organizations concerned with ageing, and to study the economic impact of the ageing population on the future size of the workforce, costs of pensions, costs of institutional care, the structure of consumption and savings and investment.

Needs in the health sector will be felt with greater and greater acuity as the population ages. New provisions will have to be made to cater for the new demands of an ageing population. Specifically designed health-care services could be made available.

Moreover, home health care - soins à domicile - for the elderly is another aspect which should not be overlooked. This could involve training in

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

gerontology and geriatrics to family care-givers, primary health workers, nurses, doctors, social workers, physiotherapists and volunteers from non-governmental organizations.

The economic impact of an ageing population is damaging to the economy. On the one hand, the economy is being deprived of labour; on the other, it has to cater for increased pension benefits. There is therefore an urgent need for Governments to support programmes aimed at integrating the elderly into mainstream development activities and the creation of income-generating activities especially for the elderly.

The appropriate policy advocated for the developing countries is the integration of the elderly in the family units. However, it is conceded that this course of action is not always possible, especially in cases where family cells have disintegrated.

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

Governments are therefore called upon to introduce appropriate housing policies for the elderly, including the provision of incentives for non-governmental organizations to set up the necessary home infrastructure where necessary.

Let me now touch on the Mauritian experience. Although the situation in Mauritius with respect to the elderly is not at present alarming, population dynamics, however, indicate that we are moving gradually towards an ageing population.

Mauritius is advocating a policy that favours keeping the elderly in the family unit instead of sending them to homes. This is in recognition of the fact that the family system is regarded as a cohesive element of our social fabric.

We are currently implementing the following measures: adopting a policy of upgrading existing homes for cases where family integration is not possible owing to family fragmentation or lack of necessary family support; setting up recreation/day-care centres to provide, inter alia, recreational activities, day care and medical support; providing free health facilities and domiciliary medical visits; encouraging the creation of senior citizens' clubs and their participation in activities designed to provide them the opportunity of demonstrating and sharing their talents and potential with the younger generation; and providing non-contributory old-age pensions.

However, we are aware that there is still room for improvement. In this respect, we are working on new projects in favour of the elderly. These will necessitate external funding for their successful implementation.

All this is to drive home the fact that a colossal amount of work must be done to avert the disaster looming ahead, particularly in the developing

(Mr. Offmann, Mauritius)

countries. But do these countries, in the grip of mass poverty, famine, malnutrition, drought, social unrest, unfavourable balance of payments, stagnant growth and economic depression, have the necessary resources to tackle these problems? Surely not.

I should like to take this opportunity to appeal to the United Nations, the international community, funding agencies and bilateral donors to put at the disposal of the developing countries the financial means and technical expertise to help them implement well-thought-out policies in favour of the elderly.

There is no nobler cause than struggling for the betterment of the vulnerable.

Mr. SARDENBERG (Brazil): Ten years after the adoption, at the World Assembly on Ageing, of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, the goals and concerns that gave rise to that initiative retain their full significance for the United Nations.

Social and demographic trends have, indeed, made it even more evident that ageing and the situation of the elderly are challenges that our societies cannot fail to face squarely.

The word "challenge", however, when applied to questions related to ageing, takes on a double meaning.

There is, first of all, an ethical challenge of social responsibility. Every country, every community has the duty to make every possible effort to ensure that the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human-rights instruments are observed without discrimination in all matters related to older persons. All of us, regardless of age, are entitled to enjoy, in our own families and communities, a life of self-fulfilment, health and security.

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

The elderly are no exception to that. It is incumbent upon all Governments to do everything in their power to prevent and combat social prejudices and attitudes that may have a negative impact on the well-being of older persons or on their full participation in the community.

Besides the issue of responsibility, we are also faced with a more pragmatic challenge, namely that of making it possible for the elderly to bring to society the extremely positive contribution they can and wish to make. Very often, such a contribution is one that they alone can make.

In many sectors, we are only beginning to explore the possibilities for action and for cooperation. Initiatives carried out under the International Plan of Action have already shown the extent to which the elderly are an exceedingly valuable asset to society, how their talents, wisdom and experience represent a still largely untapped pool of resources. As demographic changes are tending to bring about a society in which a relatively larger segment of the population is composed of elderly citizens, the creation of opportunities for the productive utilization of their capabilities is not only something that we owe them out of respect for their dignity but also something that our societies cannot afford to ignore.

In Brazil, authorities at the State and local levels, as well as the Ministry for Social Action and the National Secretariat for Social Improvement at the federal level, have been taking important steps to address questions related to the situation of the elderly.

Since the adoption of the 1988 Constitution, Government action has been based on the principle that the family, the society and the State all have the duty to assist and to help older persons by ensuring their participation in the community, by protecting their dignity and well-being and by guaranteeing their right to life.

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

Constitutional provisions have also established the protection of the elderly as one of the main pillars of social security. Other important achievements, which reflected long-time aspirations of our senior citizens, were the guarantee of a minimum wage for all older persons who manifestly cannot earn their living or have it provided by their families, and the right of all those older than 65 years to make use of urban collective transportation services free of charge.

Basic guidelines for State initiatives are founded on the notion that programmes of assistance to the elderly must be carried out preferably in their own homes.

In line with those constitutional provisions, a host of initiatives have been undertaken with a view to improving living conditions for the elderly. In a country with a relatively young population, such as ours, it is particularly important that older persons be enabled to find their rightful place in society, one befitting their dignity and the respect they merit.

One major initiative undertaken by the Brazilian Government to deal with the question of ageing is the project called the "Pool of Talents". It consists of efforts to create a network of opportunities for the elderly to join in various activities in their communities, on the basis of their own interests and abilities. It focuses on voluntary action as an instrument of social reintegration, with the aim of promoting a positive image of the senior citizen as a productive human being, capable of contributing his or her experience to a large number of services that are badly needed by communities, especially poor communities.

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

We know that it is also of fundamental importance that we, as a nation, be able to take the long view and to understand that changing demographic structures will have a considerable effect on the way our economy works. Questions of this nature lose none of their relevance because countries are struggling with seemingly more pressing economic issues, such as economic growth, inflation or unemployment. Indeed, any far-sighted analysis of development-planning has to incorporate the predictable macroeconomic impact of demographic trends and make provisions for the responses that may be called for.

In that connection, research and studies undertaken by the United Nations and other international bodies are extremely useful, and we encourage the Secretariat to proceed along that path.

It is regrettable but true that far too many older citizens still face enormously difficult situations in coping with problems like health care, adequate housing, income security and employment discrimination. The economic difficulties faced by developing countries are acutely felt by the elderly, with inflation eroding their income and unemployment threatening their livelihood.

Far too often we see the elderly caught in a situation in which inadequate material conditions prevents them from leading a productive life and enjoying independence, and where dependency makes their living conditions even worse. Social stereotyping is often both the origin and the end result of the unfortunate condition of marginalization. It is imperative that this vicious circle be broken and be replaced by the mutually reinforcing interaction of better living conditions and greater participation in the community.

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

To that end, it is a very positive development that those questions are being actively discussed and acted upon by many organizations linked to or representing older persons. In order to ensure effective national and international action in this field it is essential that their voices be attentively heard.

International cooperation for development can play an outstanding role in fostering national initiatives to improve the situation of older persons. The United Nations Principles for Older Persons, adopted last year by the General Assembly, are a valuable source of guidance and inspiration for Member States and for United Nations agencies in addressing the question of ageing. A word of praise should go to the delegation of the Dominican Republic for its untiring work that has contributed to that important accomplishment.

It is altogether fitting that the proposed global targets submitted by the Secretary-General in his report should include ideas intended to generate support for integrating ageing into national and international development plans and programmes in developing countries. It is also appropriate that such support should take the form not only of technical advice but especially of financial assistance by international development agencies.

These concerns need to be addressed in planning for the activities of the United Nations in the coming years and beyond the year 2000. We have already understood the importance of the processes that have been termed the "coming of age of humanity". Let us act accordingly.

Mrs. DE LEON (Philippines): I am grateful to have the honour of addressing this plenary meeting in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, at the World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna in 1982.

(Mrs. De Leon, Philippines)

Today most if not all of the 124 signatory Members are here in this Hall to engage in a timely review of the mandate of the Plan and its global targets. We gather to hear national reports and be enriched by new insights and lessons, especially from developing countries, as each has responded to the challenges of ageing as a human phenomenon and as a demographic sector in the context of social development.

Time has passed quickly and we are on the threshold of a new millenium. Indeed, many socio-political flash points of the last 20 years of this century, be they on a local, national or international scale, have inevitably affected our personal views, political outlook or national policies. We have been confounded beyond belief and prodded out of our inertia. With the demise of large nation States, the merger or birth of new States, the mighty fury of a volcano engulfing helpless villages, cataclysmic typhoons and earthquakes resulting in destruction and dislocations, and the daily grind of entire populations for economic survival, the times have been tough. In the Philippines, in this last decade of the twentieth century, we can say we as a young nation have prematurely aged, but we are trying to face the coming millenium not with despair but with tempered hope and raised expectations.

It is in this spirit that I report on our national efforts to actualize the vision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted at Vienna.

As a developing country, the Philippines is a young nation determined to improve the lot of all of its people. A majority of our population, 53 per cent, is in the so-called dependent sectors, that is, below or beyond the age range of the average labour force. With a population of 60 million, 48 per cent of the people are below 15 years old and only 5 per cent are 60 years and above - 3 million elderly people dispersed over islands and mountains, countryside and cities. A majority of Filipino senior citizens are

(Mrs. De Leon, Philippines)

rural-based and female. They are mainly farmers, fisherfolk, tribal people and lowlanders engaged in agriculture or workers in industries. In contrast with common notions of retirement, elderly Filipinos never really retire; they remain economically productive to the end of their days because of poverty, the agricultural nature of the Philippine communities where they live or the need to be contributing members of community life.

Common health problems of Filipino elderly people are hypertension, pulmonary tuberculosis, peptic ulcers, heart disease, asthma or varied abdominal ailments - clearly problems shared by developing and developed countries.

Filipino culture and family values stress interdependence, close-knit ties and extended kinship. That is why only 3 per cent of all senior citizens live alone or are independent. A majority, 75 per cent, live with their children, even as adult children begin families of their own. About 16 per cent live in their old homes when their children move away to establish their own households elsewhere or migrate abroad. In the latter case, despite the urbanization and nuclearization of families in other countries, many Filipino immigrant families, especially in the United States, still have three generations under one roof.

The extended family system provides security, moral support and social contacts. Placing an elderly parent or relative in a nursing home is not a Filipino family tradition. While there are 21 existing homes for the aged throughout the Philippines, Filipino families continue to play a major role in providing care for their own elderly. The homes for the aged mostly cater for those who have no family or are in dire straits. This family interdependence will continue to play a central role as an enduring institution providing care

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for the elderly in the next millenium, but not to the exclusion of all other approaches. With dislocations brought about by recent disasters and gains in industrial development and urban growth, traditional family care for the elderly will no longer suffice on its own.

(Mrs. De Leon, Philippines)

It must be supplemented by responsive Government services and private-sector support to provide and promote the well-being of the elderly in the Philippines.

Substantive Philippine Government policies and programmes for the elderly have been enacted in the spirit of the Vienna International Plan of Action. Embodied in the 1987 Constitution is a provision that

> "the State values the dignity of all individuals and ... promotes a just and dynamic social order that provides adequate services, a rising standard of living and an improved quality of life for all."

It also specifies that

> "health needs of the underprivileged elderly shall be given priority".

There is a sectoral representative for the elderly in the current Philippine Congress to monitor the interests of senior citizens, as Bills are under legislative process; this representative is appointed by the President of the Republic of the Philippines.

A Philippine Development Plan for 1987-1992 addressed the emerging issues of ageing, noting the tremendous impact that demographic changes - reduction in family size, migration of labour, break-up of family units - and economic and climatic changes in the environment have upon the main sources of support for the elderly. And in 1991, the Philippine legislature passed a senior citizens' law which provides the elderly with access to medical care, rehabilitative services and opportunities to ensure productivity and self-esteem.

As the agency at the helm, which I represent, the Department of Social Welfare and Development undertakes the awesome task of delivering social services to the disadavantaged populace, including the elderly. Others

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involved in the welfare of this group are the Department of Health, private-sector groups and non-profit agencies, including church and community-based associations. Services to the elderly have included worthy projects on peer interaction, self-help and advocacy, volunteerism and mentorship.

A Filipino community value assisting in caring for elderly is "bayanihan" or self-help. As the elderly increase in number, so do their organizations. Already there are 2,211 senior-citizen organizations established at local, provincial and regional levels. Through community mobilization or sustained advocacy by elderly groups themselves, they have been motivated to speak out and assert their interests. With active involvement of the elderly, their families and their communities, they have spurred Government action and delivery of services. The neighbourhood day-care centres in many Philippine communities and barrios have served as a focal point for the activities of the elderly in the community and have proven to be very cost-effective and appropriate ways of developing community-based services.

The Filipino elderly will continue to require increased assistance in the immediate future. Because social security benefits are limited to Government and private-sector retirement plans, there is a need to look for possible ways to help the majority of the elderly population, whose lifetime work in informal and non-unionised sectors did not allow for planned incomes and social-security support.

As the elderly become better educated and more involved in the development process, they will have higher expectations. Their consciousness will be heightened as they become more active participants in the ongoing socio-economic process rather than passive beneficiaries of Government social services. This is the vision we have for our "greying" generation.

(Mrs. De Leon, Philippines)

The elderly constitute a vast pool of human resources that are not fully tapped. They should be seen not as a burden but as a sector with untapped creative potential for community health, welfare and development. In the Philippines, the appreciation is there. What is needed is innovative and supportive mechanisms to sustain and enhance the values of self-reliance and productivity among Filipino senior citizens.

The Philippines is committed to protecting and promoting the interests of the elderly in the next era with the following humanizing measures: first, continuing to sustain the family as an institution for elderly care and assisting in mobilizing resources and facilities to this end; secondly, expanding and strengthening community-based services for the elderly; thirdly, encouraging active participation of the elderly in social development programmes that recognize their wisdom and experience; fourthly, mobilizing resources for programmes benefiting the elderly; fifthly, maximizing the partnership between Government and non-governmental organizations in advocacy of elderly rights; and finally, strengthening administrative structures and links between the Government and private sector and international networks.

As in any developing country, social services in the Philippines are never really sufficient in scope and quality. The need is vast and the resources are always limited. The need for more and better-trained support personnel to assist the elderly, especially in the rural areas, is an immediate concern. We can make up for the meagre resources and austere living conditions in our country with our political resolve, the strong will of many of us - whether in public service or in the private sector - to continue advocating and participating in the continued delivery of much-needed services to all of our people, especially the elderly, the disabled and other disadvantaged sectors.

(Mrs. De Leon, Philippines)

We are committed to serve because the urgency is there and we have a future to build, and because, as has been said, "the future is not some far-distant time and space; it is upon us now."

Mrs. PAMFILOVA (Russian Federation) (interpretation from Russian): Human life goes by fast. But unless life is cut short by some tragic circumstance, each of us, no matter what continent he or she lives on and what language he or she speaks, whether he or she is rich or poor, is destined to come to a time called, not without sadness, "the autumn of life."

The issue of extending the active period of life, of ensuring the well-deserved material and moral well-being of the older generations, is not merely a universal but a global concern, and it therefore requires the joint efforts and capabilities of the entire world community. The first steps in that direction were taken ten years ago when the General Assembly approved, on 3 December 1982, the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Without downplaying the significance of that truly historic document, which laid down the conceptual basis for many useful undertakings in this domain, at both the national and the international levels, today we must regretfully acknowledge, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (A/47/339), that the broad and ideal goals of the Plan have not been reached.

(Mrs. Pamfilova, Russian Federation)

The negative development during the past decade of the political and socio-economic situation in different parts of the world has also had its impact on the demographic situation and manifested itself most of all in an accelerated global-scale ageing of the population.

The ageing of society has affected Russia too. Today the number of people aged over 60 already amounts to 17 per cent of the total population. However, unlike industrialized countries, we are facing reduced longevity. The most severely affected are those who stopped working immediately upon retirement - that is, those who drastically changed their usual lifestyle. Unfortunately, among our retired people, retirement is perceived as a very difficult and even painful process of living out one's days, rather than the next stage of life, offering new opportunities.

The disintegration of their social immunity, the realization that extraordinary sacrifices and enormously hard work throughout life have, in their declining years, brought neither personal well-being to them nor prosperity to the State, evokes among our elderly a bitter feeling of uselessness, of a life lived in vain. This leads to acute moral and emotional stresses among older people.

At this juncture, when the gap between the increased need for social assistance and the diminished capabilities of the State has dramatically widened, the Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Social Protection are doing their best to ease the burden of the transition period for the elderly.

This year the percentage of resources allocated to social needs has almost doubled. However, the increasing social payments, including pensions,

(Mrs. Pamfilova, Russian Federation)

are quickly losing their value, and their rate of increase lags behind inflation.

In these circumstances we have begun to draft a radical reform of the entire social-protection system for the population.

Pension reform is one of the measures envisaged as part of that project. In particular, the legal foundation has been laid for the creation of private pension funds to supplement the State pension system. The experience acquired in the functioning of such funds in other countries is of great interest to Russia.

The start of the long-awaited process of privatization should become a very important element of social protection during the general economic reform under way in Russia. The Ministry of Social Protection has regarded as a top priority the involvement of retired persons in the privatization process and the provision of maximum protection for their interests, as well as for those of the disabled and orphans under measures now being worked out, special investment funds that guarantee a steady income will be created; privatization vouchers will be used as company capital, as well as in other ways, including the sale and purchase of real estate and land.

We hope that the land-sale proposals made by the President and the Government will finally be supported by the Russian Parliament.

Socio-gerontological rehabilitation should become the most suitable adaptation method for the elderly; its main goal is the extension of active longevity, including maximum utilization of the professional and other life experiences of the elderly. We have already taken some steps in that direction. For example, we have deleted from Russian labour legislation a discriminatory article according to which when a person retired by reason of

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age, his permanent labour contract was terminated. The abolition of that article made it possible, notwithstanding the growing unemployment problem, to give the elderly equal rights in the labour market, especially since all working pensioners receive their salary plus the full amount of their pension. For those who cannot help themselves, even partially, a system of emergency social assistance has been created and is now being developed further. As of today, there are 800 such services operating throughout Russia.

We shall have to reorganize our traditional and now thoroughly outmoded system of permanent social-security institutions, in the light of the need for the comprehensive socio-gerontological rehabilitation of the elderly and their return, where possible, to active life.

My reason for referring briefly to the situation of my country's elderly citizens is by no means that it is unique. On the contrary, many of the problems I mentioned have been well known for a long time, both to millions of people of that age group in the developing and developed countries and to many previous generations of the elderly in all parts of the world. In Russia, however, as in a number of other countries which today, in a very harsh political and socio-economic climate, are making the difficult transition to a market economy, these problems manifest themselves with particular severity for those who in their old age fell victim to ideological myths of the past and could not withstand their collision with the circumstances of real life. But it is precisely the collapse of those myths, which only yesterday separated the so-called Soviet people from the rest of the human race, that gives us hope that the world, entering a post-confrontational stage of its development, will propel international cooperation in the social sphere,

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including cooperation concerning the problem of ageing, out of a long period of stagnation.

Despite both objective and subjective difficulties in the development of a number of regions and countries, one must admit that - not without the influence of the United Nations, especially its International Plan of Action - the world community has made some progress in dealing with the problems of the elderly. There is a growing recognition of their importance, not only on the part of governmental structures but in society at large as well. This has been facilitated in no small measure by the proclamation by the United Nations of 1 October as the International Day for the Elderly, by the General Assembly's adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and by the global information campaign on the problems of ageing, conducted by the Organization in 1992. Our delegation views with profound satisfaction the long-term practical strategy described in the report "Global targets on ageing for the year 2001" (A/47/339). What is particularly appealing in that document is its primary focus on truly practical activities and on obtaining concrete results. Of great interest is the section which relates to global targets and contains the Organization's recommendations to Member States on the setting of national targets in connection with the problems of ageing. I believe that those recommendations will - with due regard, of course, for Russia's specific circumstances - provide reliable assistance in our work at home on the entire range of problems referred to in section IV of the Secretary-General's report.

The Russian delegation is convinced that the United Nations, which today plays a key role in organizing and coordinating wide-ranging international efforts in the area of problems of the elderly, will continue to serve as a

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focal point for all States and non-governmental organizations - a global laboratory for the most advanced international expertise, theoretical and applied knowledge. In this connection, one would hope that the United Nations Vienna Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and other bodies and organizations of the United Nations system that deal with social issues will receive from the Organization all the necessary material, human and other resources for addressing their tasks.

It is a good rule to begin everything, especially criticism, with oneself. For that reason, the Government of the new Russia, realistically judging its capabilities for international cooperation in connection with the problems of ageing, quite understandably is not able as yet to give to the international community more than it expects at present to receive from it. This is unfortunately true of many States in the world. However, a mentality of dependency with regard to international assistance is alien to us. I can assure members that while dealing with our domestic problems, we in Russia are always prepared to participate in international cooperation projects and, while gaining access to the experience of other States, we are prepared to contribute our share to the pool of joint efforts that will enable every inhabitant of our planet to bear, to his last breath, the proud name of human being.

Mr. NAVARRETE (Chile) (interpretation from Spanish): It is an honour for me to address the General Assembly on this occasion, which commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Assembly's adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing at its thirty-seventh session.

We believe that this decade has been very important in the consideration of the subject of ageing, which has aroused the interest of the international community. Many initiatives have been taken to promote and support respect for the rights of the elderly. In this connection, I should like to mention the establishment of the International Institute on Ageing in Malta in 1988; the establishment of the African Society of Gerontology in 1989; the creation of the Banyan Fund Association: A World Fund for Ageing, in 1991; and the designation, in 1990, of 1 October as the International Day for the Elderly.

We also feel that in the past year a major step was taken when the General Assembly, through resolution 46/91, adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons - independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity - which States will undoubtedly bear in mind in drawing up national plans in this field.

We are pleased to note that the systematic consideration of this subject and the scientific advances that have been made have contributed to dispelling many myths associated with old age. Being an older person is not synonymous with being infirm or incapacitated. Studies show that the great majority of elderly persons enjoy good health, with no major physical or mental decline. This, together with recognition of the importance of older people in the transmission of culture and values and in the provision of support in family life, means that the idea of "productive ageing" is gaining ground.

(Mr. Navarrete, Chile)

Older people have reached an advanced stage of life with a very important legacy to be passed on, one that can be acquired only with the passage of the years - experience. The generations must not fail to tap this valuable source of wisdom.

We in Chile are aware that over the decades there has been a significant increase in the relative proportion of the population represented by people of 60 years and above. In 1950 this group of people constituted 6.8 per cent of the total population. In 1990 the proportion was 9 per cent, and it is expected that by the year 2025 it will be 15 per cent. In absolute numbers, it is estimated that there are approximately 1.2 million elderly in the country.

Another indicator of the ageing process that is beginning to be felt in Chile's population structure is the fact that in recent years the total population of the country grew by 27 per cent, whereas the number of people of 60 and over increased by about 50 per cent. It can therefore be said that Chile will change from being a country with a young age structure, as it was in 1959, when approximately 47 per cent of its population were under the age of 20, to being a country with an ageing population structure by the year 2025, with 31 per cent of its population under the age of 20.

The number of elderly in my country is increasing, as the figures I have just given indicate. This prompts us to take into account certain factors concerning the main characteristics of the process. Because of the magnitude of the figures the phenomenon of population ageing cannot be interpreted only as a biological process affecting individuals; rather, it must be seen as a process that affects the social and economic structure of the country and, therefore, as a variable to be considered in planning its development.

(Mr. Navarrete, Chile)

In the economic sphere, the change in demographic structure that I have described is expected to be felt at the macro-economic level, affecting variables such as labour supply, in terms of shortage; production costs, in terms of an increase in the cost of manpower; and a reorientation of overall demand.

We must also take into account the fact that for the individual ageing constitutes, in the great majority of countries, an objective cause of impoverishment as pensions are generally minimal - a fact that has a considerable effect on the income of retirees.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the unemployment problem facing the younger segments of our population, we realize that it will be very difficult in the near future to give the elderly a role in the economy.

In the social sphere the phenomenon of ageing must be considered from a humanitarian standpoint, taking individuals into account - their physical and social decline and, often, their marginalization in the community. In this respect it should be pointed out that our societies have not yet been able to give the elderly a social role to replace that of being workers, which means a loss of social identity. It also means that the causes of the individual's decline in old age are not only biological; they also result from the social structure, which places limits on the elderly person's capacity to continue to develop as a human being.

In our country governmental, non-governmental and private organizations are increasingly interested in implementing assistance and development programmes for the older population, and there is a readiness on the part of political parties to confront the problem of ageing. None the less, there are still few intersectoral initiatives on this subject. For this reason retirees

(Mr. Navarrete, Chile)

increasingly want to establish their own structures and organisms so that they may work jointly to protect their rights and achieve a better quality of life.

The wide-ranging expertise of the developed countries in dealing with this subject can be of great use to countries that have growing adult populations. In this respect, our country considers it highly useful to establish technical assistance mechanisms in this field to make the experience of the developed countries available to us and to facilitate advisory services for the implementation of policies. My country also attaches great importance to the role that the United Nations can play in the promotion of international cooperation to help the developing countries to increase their own capacity to confront effectively the question of the ageing of their populations.

We believe that one of the major successes of the United Nations in the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in the past decade has been to make the international community aware of its importance, through publicity and the provision of information. Today we are moving into another stage, and we welcome the strategy to be followed in it, a strategy submitted to us by our Organization through the publication of the global targets on ageing for the year 2001.

We consider that our countries will benefit in particular from the implementation of targets Nos. 1, 2 and 3: support countries in setting national targets on ageing; generate support for integrating ageing into national and international development plans and programmes; and generate support for community-based programmes of care and participation of older persons.

(Mr. Navarrete, Chile)

We also feel it will be very useful in strengthening the publicity endeavour if we attain targets Nos. 4 and 5, which include improving cross-national research on ageing, including harmonization of terminology and methodology. We consider attaining targets Nos. 6, 7 and 8 to be fundamental in the task of confronting the phenomenon of ageing. On this point we agree about the need to establish a global network of senior volunteers for social and economic development. We commend the initiative to facilitate closer cooperation between non-governmental organizations working in this field and the idea of facilitating closer cooperation between intergovernmental organizations on ageing.

Another interesting aspect of the subject is the growing alienation at the family level between grandparents and grandchildren, to be seen in many cases, above all in the developed countries, the former's being totally unaware of the life experiences of the latter, and vice versa.

Our country is committed to complying with the guidelines contained in the targets. This will undoubtedly help us achieve during the second decade the goals set in the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Mr. MOHAMED (Malaysia): I wish first to take this opportunity to express my delegation's heartfelt condolences to the Egyptian delegation on the recent tragedy that has befallen its country. It is our sincere hope that those personally affected by the disaster will recover from it swiftly and that conditions there will soon return to normal.

Ageing is a fate that awaits us all. Many of us will age gracefully and enjoy life to the fullest to the end, but for others ageing is a painful experience, physically and emotionally. Until 10 years ago we took no notice of the emerging problem of ageing. But since the World Assembly on Ageing in

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

Vienna in 1982, we have come to realize this looming problem. The International Plan of Action on Ageing, drafted at the World Assembly on Ageing and adopted by the United Nations at its thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly, presented us with a good basis to face this problem and we should attempt to consider and implement the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action.

The report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (A/47/369) indicates that overall the number of older people has increased, while the number of young people has decreased. Signs also indicate that the number of older people is increasing at a much faster rate in the developing countries than in the developed countries. This will inevitably lead to a shrinking of the labour force and of income to provide for the care of children and older people, while new problems, particularly dependency and the demand on medical services, will also increase.

In discussing this issue, I was struck by a lecture given by Jacques Cousteau the famed scientist and explorer at an event organized by the United Nations Population Fund a few weeks ago. He said that human beings, designed to be victims of nature from the beginning of their existence 3 million years ago, have dared to defy the fundamental laws of nature by trying, and succeeding, to divorce themselves from the law of the jungle and evolve new standards of ethics and behaviour. Mankind has also successfully defeated the natural perils of nature, such as diseases, until it has reached the stage of human existence today where laws, values and conditions governing the existence of men are so sophisticated and complicated in order to ensure their continuing survival and well-being.

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

Mr. Cousteau believes that our struggle to establish "anti-natural values" to replace the harsh natural rules of nature has rewarded us with new duties and perils. From being a victim of nature, we have become its protector, and the end result of our successful divorce from nature is that we now face the danger of a population explosion similar to what he believes happened on Easter Island thousands of years ago. In such an explosion demands for scarce natural resources will be so great that a social conflict will erupt, culminating in genocide of the weak and, presumably, the aged.

Mr. Cousteau made us realize that what is natural in the animal kingdom is unnatural to us as social animals, because we have emotion and compassion and we cannot treat our elders according to the law of the jungle as animals do. However, because of circumstances we are slowly creating conditions whereby such behaviour may become unavoidable and, God forbid, acceptable.

The Secretary-General has estimated that the number of people over the age of 60 will reach 1.2 billion in the year 2025, of whom 70 per cent will be living in today's developing countries. We are presented therefore with the dilemma of controlling population growth to avoid the possibility of a population explosion, and yet the same measure will result in an imbalance between the number of young and old.

There are countries which have taken drastic yet understandable action to slow down the spiralling numbers of citizens by introducing the "one-child policy". This policy might work if it could be sustained, but, because of the increase in life-expectancy, experts have warned that it could also result in the problem that when children of the "one-child policy" reach maturity they will have the burden of taking care of up to six elderly people - their parents and grandparents. The same is also true in other countries or

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

societies where social and economic problems have naturally discouraged the bearing of more children.

Ageing is not something that we have to fear. Older people can still be productive and contribute to society and in return be independent. However, a niche must be found for us to be useful when we reach old age, while programmes and legislation must be instituted to take care of us when we become "frail-old". Better health education and the promotion of healthy habits from a young age will help to reduce the number of the "frail-old" and ensure that we place less of a burden on society when we reach old age. However, we have to begin such education now.

As I have said, the pressures of modern society and the increasing cost of living will inevitably mean pressure for a change in the present acceptable standard of caring for the elderly. Traditionally, the extended family has given much of the necessary physical, financial and emotional support to the elderly. However, industrialization has given individuals more freedom than ever before from the ties of their families. This means that the day will come when the extended family gives way to the nuclear family, with a strong possibility that the elderly will be left to take care of themselves.

Malaysia has yet to establish a definite separate policy on ageing. The fabric of our society is still strongly based on our traditional family values, developed by our custom and religion, which strongly emphasize the importance of the welfare of the elderly.

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

The extended family is still common in Malaysia, and this has the effect of dampening the effect of the ageing of the population. We have yet to experience the phenomenon of "granny dumping" or the stark reality of homeless elderly people. However, we realize that this does not mean that the same phenomena will not occur in Malaysia. The lack of research and the still largely agrarian society in Malaysia may have obscured the true extent of the problem of ageing.

The Government of Malaysia therefore is not taking the matter of ageing lightly, and appreciates the attention given to it by the United Nations. The Malaysian Government has implemented General Assembly resolution 45/106, by declaring 1 October as the Day of the Elderly. Currently, our policy on ageing is encompassed within our general policy on social welfare, where we continue to subscribe to the philosophy that a strong and resilient family system forms an integral part of all aspects of social development. The objective of this policy is to create a fully caring society and culture in facing the onslaught of increasingly complex social and economic situations.

The Second Malaysian Outline Perspective Plan, or OPP2, which embodies a New Development Policy designed to enable Malaysia to attain developed nation status by the year 2020, has strengthened the foundations for the creation of a nation with a caring society. The Prime Minister of Malaysia has defined the establishment of a caring society as a social system in which society will come before self and the welfare of the people will revolve not around the State or the individual, but rather around a strong and resilient family system. He has also identified the creation of a caring society as one of the nine central strategic challenges for Malaysia to meet in order to attain the objective of developed nation status.

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

The OPP2 envisages that the rapid socio-economic transformation that will take place will depend principally on families playing an important role as agents of development and constructive change in society. At the same time, family expectations and commitments must be met and encouraged to reach even higher levels with a view to achieving a happy, stable quality of life and to ensure the quality of life of future generations. To this end, the development of a National Family Policy will be a priority so as to provide the framework for the formulation and implementation of "family-sensitive" policies, and to devise appropriate means, including the welfare of the aged, to deal with a range of specific problems related to the family as a unit.

The maintenance of a traditional Malaysian family culture that defines clearly the familial responsibilities within an extended family system will also receive priority. In this context, the role of women, as the basic family nurturers and agents for national development, will be given particular attention. In this connection, I would suggest that the welfare of ageing women be explored at the World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995, in view of the fact that ageing women have special problems that have to be dealt with differently. Research in the United States has shown that on average women live longer than men, and they often live out their lives in poverty, especially after the death of their spouse.

When the time comes for us to develop a specific national policy on ageing, Malaysia will take into account what has been achieved so far by the United Nations. The 62 recommendations contained in the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in 1982, will make that task easier. In the meantime, we will try to incorporate the eight-point practical strategy of

(Mr. Mohamed, Malaysia)

global targets on ageing for the year 2001 suggested by the Secretary-General in document A/47/339, in the implementation of our objective to create a caring society. The proposals made by the Secretary-General make a lot of sense, especially in getting society to focus on this problem so as to prepare it for the tasks ahead. In this sense, I believe we can encourage and disseminate the importance of caring for ageing persons by including ageing on the agenda of the proposed world summit for social development.

Mr. KHALIL (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): It is a pleasure to have the honour of standing among you as representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and of participating in the meetings of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly with a view to adopting the International Plan of Action on Ageing, which aims at guaranteeing care for the elderly, who have done their best to raise the generations that save their communities and humanity at large, and by so doing have deserved our appreciation.

On this occasion, I cannot but commend the efforts that have gone into elaborating the Plan of Action which we are gathered here to adopt. I wish that our work in this respect will be successful in serving humanity and particularly the elderly.

I also welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, its conclusions and important recommendations.

Allow me to seize this opportunity to report briefly on the situation of the elderly in the Syrian Arab Republic. I will give you a quick overview of the efforts made by the Government to care for them on the basis of the definition of an old person, namely, a citizen who is over 60 years of age and

(Mr. Khalil, Syrian Arab Republic)

who has officially retired according to the provisions of labour legislation in my country.

The percentage of the elderly in Syria is 6.4 per cent of the overall population. We can say that the concerns of an old person differ from one society to the other in line with the differences in the social and economic relations prevailing in this society or that. On that basis, family life in the Syrian Arab Republic, like that in other Arab countries, is based on interdependence, respect, loyalty and compassion, which makes caring for the elderly the primary responsibility of the members of the family. Next come the competent social institutions and, in the third place, the State.

As a matter of fact, most of the private institutions that have been established in Syria were set up, originally, to provide health care as a priority for the elderly and the handicapped. It would be useful to mention that a number of private providers of social care in Syria has reached 505 charitable and social institutions of different types. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is the umbrella authority which supervises those institutions administratively, financially and technically. Furthermore, it provides them with all possible assistance annually to support their efforts in these regards.

We have two governmental institutions in Damascus and Aleppo, which provide full health, nutritional and social care to the elderly.

(Mr. Khalil, Syrian Arab Republic)

Furthermore our Government will follow a new approach. We will reconsider the legislation on the elderly so as to guarantee them a dignified life and to enable us to benefit from the work and efforts in accordance with their potential, expertise and abilities.

Here it is worth noting that the fundamental law on the country's work-force includes provisions that allow us to benefit from the services of the elderly at the age of 60 by extending their service to the age of 65 and contracting them as experts and specialists over that age - at much higher remuneration than those included in the salary tables, depending on their expertise and speciality.

The Government has embarked on the amendment of some of the provisions of the social security law enacted in 1959, which is still in effect. We have also prepared a new draft law providing comprehensive insurance and social-security coverage to the elderly, with the right to receive a retirement pension at the age of 65. The new draft law includes the provision of social care for pensioners, nursing homes for those without families, including full board, housing, food, beverages, cultural and recreational activities and stays in summer resorts and sanitoria. The draft law does not leave out the working woman, who can retire at a younger age than men, with full equal rights.

That is an overview of the situation of the elderly in the Syrian Arab Republic and the various kinds of care with which they are provided.

In conclusion I wish once more to express my thanks for attending these meetings and my Government's appreciation for the United Nations efforts to

(Mr. Khalil, Syrian Arab Republic)

improve care for the elderly and to provide them with opportunities for full integration into society and their inclusion in the construction of communities.

AGENDA ITEM 138

OBSERVER STATUS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/47/L.6)

The PRESIDENT: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution issued as document A/47/L.6.

I call on the representative of Sweden to introduce the draft resolution.

Mr. OSVALD (Sweden): It is a pleasure for me to introduce draft resolution A/47/L.6, on observer status for the International Organization for Migration. The present procedure is a result of a decision by the Governing Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in which it requested its Chairman, the then Swedish Ambassador in Geneva, Mr. Lars Anell, to undertake consultations on this matter.

The draft resolution before us is sponsored by almost 70 countries representing all the regions of the world. In addition to the 51 countries listed on the draft resolution, the following countries have joined the group: Albania, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, Jordan, Mali, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines, San Marino, and Soa Tome and Principe. This sponsorship reflects the broad membership of IOM. Seventy-eight of the Member States of the United Nations are members or observers of the organization. Similarly, the activities of IOM reach every region of the world.

(Mr. Osvald, Sweden)

The International Organization for Migration was created in 1951 as the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. It has since broadened its scope of activities and evolved into a truly global organization. The current name was adopted in 1989. IOM is based in Geneva.

The objective of IOM is to ensure the orderly migration of persons who are in need of the services of the organization. These persons could be migrants, refugees and persons displaced either externally or internally. IOM also undertakes programmes aimed at the transfer of qualified human resources, sometimes referred to as migration for development. It promotes technical cooperation and serves as an international forum for discussion of migration issues among Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. It also provides the member and observer States with a mechanism through which migration-related activities can be coordinated.

IOM is closely cooperating with many parts of the United Nations system. Its experts are involved in preparations for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, where the question of migration will undoubtedly be high on the agenda.

The Commission on Human Rights invited IOM to contribute to the study on internally displaced persons. With the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), IOM cooperates closely in the ongoing voluntary repatriation to South Africa and to Afghanistan.

IOM is also an integral partner in the carrying out of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees. IOM works with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Cambodia and with UNHCR in the former Yugoslavia.

(Mr. Osvald, Sweden)

All these endeavours undoubtedly have contributed to a standing invitation expressed in General Assembly resolution 46/182 to the organization to attend the coordination meetings convened by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

Admitting IOM as an observer to the deliberations of the General Assembly will contribute to better coordination and division of labour at a time when resources need to be allocated in the most efficient manner.

IOM has expressed a desire to intensify its cooperation with the United Nations. The draft resolution before us suggests that the General Assembly decide to invite IOM to participate in the sessions and work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer and request the Secretary-General to take necessary action to implement the present draft resolution.

I am confident that the General Assembly will find it appropriate to consider this request favourably.

The PRESIDENT: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/47/L.6.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/47/L.6 was adopted (resolution 47/4).

The PRESIDENT: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 138?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.